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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2169
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0255
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 0267
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0753
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0561
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0262
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0430
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCPDO/USDOC WASHDC 0586
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0610
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2572
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1951
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BISHKEK 000614

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN (GEHRENBECK)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/24/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT AND PRESS TARGET MANAS AIRBASE

REF: A. BISHKEK 528

[1](#)B. 06 BISHKEK 1407

[1](#)C. BISHKEK 597

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Classified By: Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During a packed parliamentary committee session May 23, MPs criticized the Prosecutor General's office for its handling of the Hatfield case and called for the ouster of the U.S. military from Manas Airbase. Interest in extension renewals for the base's operations as well as tax and compensation questions interrupted the general criticisms of the base. Deputy Defense Minister Oruzbayev advanced several arguments in defense of the base, and later reported to the Ambassador that Defense Minister Isakov said "Kyrgyzstan would stay the course" on the base. MPs also learned about progress by the president's special commission on the base to develop "options" for the base's future. The session ended with plans for further debate and a future resolution aiming to denounce the base.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary continued: On the day before the parliamentary spectacle, President Bakiyev's Chief of Staff told the Ambassador there was no basis for the base's closure, and said he would "help" the United States. Parliament Speaker Sultanov also downplayed the parliamentary session and delayed a planned base debate. We believe that there is high-level support for the base's continued presence, but sense that some opposition is designed to increase the financial cost to the United States of the base's continued presence in Kyrgyzstan. By late June we anticipate a parliamentary debate and resolution, but we expect Speaker Sultanov, in coordination with the government,

to ensure the resolution is not too "painful." However, Russian-supported opposition to the base will also intensify as Bishkek prepares to host the August Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit. End summary.

Setting the Parliamentary Stage

¶3. (SBU) Before a packed parliamentary chamber, Defense and Security Committee Chairman Rashid Tagayev presided over a May 23 joint committee session to discuss the Ivanov case and Manas Airbase. Members of Tagayev's committee, joined by representatives of the parliamentary committees on international policy, law and order, anti-corruption, and forestry and environmental affairs, grilled Vice Prime Minister Dosbol Nur-uulu, deputy ministers and other officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Finance and Interior as well as from the Prosecutor General's office and the State Tax Committee. A silent Mrs. Ivanova, accompanied by her attorney Galina Skripkina, as well as a number of journalists also attended. The Embassy forwarded regrets on behalf of the Ambassador and Base Commander Colonel Reese to invitations to participate, which we received late on May 22. Some MPs were upset that the Ambassador and Colonel Reese were not present. The Embassy, however, had an observer in the audience.

Joint Committee Reflects on Hatfield Case

¶4. (C) Pro-government MPs Iskhak Masaliyev and Khadjimurat Korkmazov lambasted government representatives -- especially the Prosecutor General's office -- for its poor performance in the Hatfield investigation. In response, the MPs heard

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that the Kyrgyz investigation had been hampered by lack of feedback from U.S. authorities and ultimately had "not yet been closed." (Note: Earlier in the day, pursuant to Embassy requests for a copy of the Kyrgyz investigative report into the Hatfield/Ivanov incident, we heard that the Kyrgyz report may now require further judicial action. The MFA later expressed ignorance of the report's status, even after Deputy Foreign Minister Kydyrov told the Ambassador on May 18 that the MFA had provided Embassy with the report. End note.) Both MPs touted the Hatfield case, as well as the May 7 incident involving a U.S. base contractor and the death of a Kyrgyz pedestrian (reftel A), as "proof" that the U.S. would never adhere to Kyrgyz laws.

Parliamentarians Vent about the Base

¶5. (C) After remarking that discussion of the Hatfield case had reached a "dead end," Korkmazov and other MPs turned their attention to Manas Airbase. Accusing the base of posing a security threat to Kyrgyzstan, Korkmazov and Masaliyev cited the ouster of U.S. forces from Uzbekistan as a model for closing Manas Airbase. Masaliyev said that the base agreement, at a minimum, should be denounced, and that a lawsuit should be filed to compensate for damages incurred during the September 2006 plane collision (reftel B). MPs discussed the validity of the 2001 base agreement, and questioned if explicit extension approvals were required. (Note: The agreement states that after the first year, the agreement shall continue to be in force unless terminated by either party on 180 days written notice through diplomatic channels. End note.) Skripkina, after consulting her notes, advised MPs of the 180 day timeframe. Several MPs asked about taxes, particularly related to the land code, and environmental damage.

Deputy Defense Minister Responds

¶6. (C) Deputy Defense Minister Orozbayev advanced several

arguments in defense of the base -- but was often drowned out by Masaliyev and Korkmazov. Orozbayev detailed base operations data and outlined the base's contributions to Kyrgyzstan's security and economy. He and the Deputy Finance Minister discussed base-related tax revenues of 384 million soms (around \$10 million) for 2002-2007, but also addressed payment mechanisms for U.S. compensation for the base. Oruzbayev also noted that base officials had asked for reports of environmental damage in order to consider appropriate compensation.

¶7. (C) Later on May 24, Oruzbayev pulled the Ambassador aside to comment on the "ugly and tense" parliamentary session. He said the government's presentations were fact-based, but the parliamentarians were only interested in populist rhetoric. He was surprised by the low level of discourse and said that one deputy even questioned his patriotism for his "defense" of the U.S. and the base. Oruzbayev told the Ambassador he had briefed Defense Minister Isakov about the session, and reported that Isakov remarked "Kyrgyzstan is going to stay the course."

What are the Next Steps?

¶8. (SBU) Although Deputy Foreign Minister Kydyrov stressed the importance of the base and the need to comply with

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Kyrgyzstan's commitments, he informed the MPs that the 2001 agreement would be reviewed with an aim to modify certain aspects of the accord. MPs, however, seemed more interested in a resolution denouncing continued base operations. Additionally, MP Korkmazov promised that his constituents -- his parliamentary district encompasses the base -- would block the road leading to the base. (Note: It is not clear if his pledge is related to previously-announced plans for demonstrations June 2 at the base and Embassy by Masaliyev's and Ivanova's new group, "Movement for the Withdrawal of the American Airbase from Kyrgyzstan." End note.) He also claimed that military operations in Afghanistan were over, and joined Masaliyev in urging lawmakers to terminate the base agreement.

¶9. (SBU) Tagayev concluded the session with promises of a plenary debate on the base. However, Tagayev also reportedly pledged that Parliament would take into account the government's views, especially those generated by the special presidential commission on the base, prior to any final parliamentary action. Vice Prime Minister Nur-uluu had earlier advised MPs that the commission would finish its work soon, and would provide "several options" regarding the base's future.

Taking the Battle to the Press

¶10. (SBU) The Ambassador gave separate interviews with internet news site "AKIpress" and Kyrgyz National Television "KTR" on May 22; and on May 23 and 24, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald Neumann gave a short press conference and an in-depth interview. Amidst comments on the base and the Hatfield-Ivanov case, the Ambassador again rejected rumors that Manas Airbase would be used for military actions against Iran. While AKIPress largely accurately reported the Ambassador's remarks, the May 23 Russian language papers continued their offensive against the base and the \$55,000 payment made to Alexander Ivanov's widow on May 21 (reftel C). Local commentators have trivialized the amount of the payment and emphasized "deceitful" U.S. actions related to the Hatfield investigation.

Kyrgyz Assurances

¶11. (C) Prior to the parliamentary committee session,

Presidential Chief of Staff Medet Sadyrkulov expressed his belief to the Ambassador on May 22 that nothing "negative" would emerge from the parliamentary hearings, and stressed that there was no basis for the base's closure. He added that the U.S. should remain confident and "not worry" about the base. He said he would "help" the United States.

¶12. (C) In a late May 23 meeting with Parliament Speaker Sultanov and two other MPs, Sultanov stopped MPs Masaliyev and Abdyldayev, who both participated in the base session earlier in the day, from responding to the Ambassador's question regarding the next steps on base discussions in Parliament. Instead, Sultanov advised the Ambassador that it had been a "normal hearing" and assured the Ambassador not to be concerned. We later learned that a plenary discussion of the base, previously planned for May 25, was no longer on the schedule.

Comment

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¶13. (C) The parliamentary session on the base, like much recent media coverage of the base, provided an outlet for many populist statements. However, the comments by Sadyrkulov, Sultanov and Isakov possibly underscore a higher-level commitment to keeping the base. We will see what proposals, if any, the government formally submits regarding the base agreement. We also note that President Bakiyev has been noticeably silent on the base lately. As described above, Sadyrkulov, who is one of Bakiyev's closest advisors, advised the Ambassador not to be concerned about the parliamentary hearings. Opposition by some Bakiyev loyalists to the base may, in fact, be a tactic to increase the cost to the United States of maintaining the base's presence in Kyrgyzstan. We do not sense any intention in the government to expel the base, and expect the government to stand firm when needed.

¶14. (C) Although pressure on the base will continue as the August Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit approaches, Parliament will break for its summer recess in late June and not reconvene until after the SCO summit. Before the late June recess, however, we expect a parliamentary debate and resolution on the base. Speaker Sultanov will likely consult with the government to orchestrate a resolution that is not fatal to the base. Meanwhile, we will monitor turnout at the June 2 protest actions announced by the "Movement for the Withdrawal of the American Base from Kyrgyzstan" to gauge popular interest in the base issue. While there is domestic opposition to the base, Russian interests are fueling the opposition prior to the SCO summit. Andrei Grozin, a Moscow-based analyst, predicted in today's Kyrgyz press that the United States will find something "unpleasant" coming from the SCO summit.

¶15. (C) The Ambassador will continue to engage the local press next week, and we have begun planning with the base to extend invitations for parliamentarians to tour the base and provide briefings to government officials. An upcoming trip to Afghanistan by many of those involved in the base debate will provide another opportunity to emphasize the importance of the base to multinational efforts in Afghanistan. We plan to utilize the upcoming visits by Secretary Gates, Assistant Secretary Boucher and Admiral Fallon to reinforce key

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messages in an effort to prevent anything "unpleasant"
emanating from the SCO summit.

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